

No net neutrality = internet irrelevancy

To Whom It May Concern,

Aside from the form letter that follows, I would like to share my own experiences with "neutral" vs. "paid" internet services as a hockey blogger.

I'm a huge Red Wings fan who devours a good hundred hockey articles online per day, and I've been working on message boards of some sort or other since 1996. I've been working for MLive for a year and a half as their Red Wings blogger, and while I don't get paid much, I'm on the road to becoming a full-time hockey writer.

In the last ten years, I've seen websites come and go, and influence in the hockey world ebb and fade. We're at a point right now where teams and players have never been more accountable to their fans, and that's made both the on-ice product better, and it's made the owners ***A LOT OF MONEY***--the NHL's revenues have increased from the \$1.8 billion range to about \$2.3 billion in only three seasons.

As noted, however, some of hockey's biggest luminaries have lost most of their clout because their employers started to charge for content.

In the early 00's, Faceoff.com was considered the pre-eminent hockey website, and the writers for the CanWest Global newspaper chain--the Ottawa Citizen, Montreal Gazette, National Post (out of Toronto), Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Vancouver Province, and Vancouver Sun were out-read and out-influenced the more tabloid "Sun" chain (the Sun newspaper chain includes every Canadian city except Vancouver) by far.

CanWest Global decided to shut down Faceoff.com, believing that their content was so good that people in the U.S. and Canada would pay \$15 a month to access said content.

Five years later, The Sun chain dominates the Canadian media in power and influence, and the CanWest Global journalists have been handicapped significantly because so few people see their "premium content" articles.

I've seen TSN.ca try to go to a pay site, the Globe and Mail go to a pay site, NHL teams charge for pay sites with "premium content," and every single time, the companies that decide that it's only right to demand money for content lose in terms of readership.

If somebody's hard up for cash, they simply ask their patrons to please click on the banner ads as

they have to make a living, and that usually does the trick.

As someone who's in the business of looking for information, the concept that AT&T, Comcast, Verizon, and other internet service providers would only allow me to access the content that's agreed to pay for the privilege of allowing me to access it seems utterly ridiculous. The Information Superhighway will become a two-lane country road before you can say, "Well, that was a big mistake!" Websites will fold, access to information will decrease exponentially, and, eventually, the internet experiences of millions upon millions of web-surfers who ALREADY PAY for access to information will be equivalent to the 1995 version of the internet, at best--with few options.

Worse, the websites who can pay to be accessed won't particularly care what the people who pay their paycheques think about the quality or quantity of the content they provide.

As a hockey blogger, I'd end up being able to access a third of the websites I do now, and they'd provide half the content they do now because hockey isn't as profitable for the U.S. media as it is for the Canadian media.

Don't be idiots. The big ISP companies want to make more money by basically destroying public access to information. We already pay to access said content, and that should be more than enough profit for ISP's.

In the end, I say this as a blogger who works for a smaller website who knows what would happen if the internet became any less "neutral"--I'd lose my job.

Don't screw this all up for everybody, hockey fans and non hockey fans alike.

George Malik

Net Neutrality is essential to free speech, equal opportunity and economic innovation in America. Since the FCC removed this basic protection in 2005, the top executives of phone and cable companies have stated their intention to become the Internet's gatekeepers and to discriminate against Web sites that don't pay their added tolls.

This fundamental change would end the open Internet as we know it. It would damage my ability to connect with others, share information and participate in our 21st century democracy and economy. The FCC must ensure that broadband providers do not block, interfere with or discriminate against any lawful Internet traffic based on its ownership, source or destination.

